

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS CALGARY 000706

SIPDIS

STATE FOR OEA/IHA (CRODDY, FOSTER, SINGER, DALEY), WHA/CAN
(NELSON), M/MED/DASHO
(TRIPPLETT)

STATE PLEASE PASS TO DHHA AND CDC

DHHA FOR BILL STEIGER AND ROSE BROWNRIDGE, OFFICE OF GLOBAL
HEALTH

CDC FOR ROBERT BALDWIN, OFFICE OF GLOBAL HEALTH

USDA FOR APHIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: TBIO KSCA SOCI PREL CA WHO KSTH
SUBJECT: FOUL FOWL FLU FIGHTERS

¶1. (U) Taking advantage of the media frenzy generated by the recent discoveries of a low pathogenic strain of avian flu in British Columbia and California, the Calgary Health Region (CHR) board announced on November 29 its strategy for combating pandemic outbreaks. Experts predict that, in the event of the avian flu's mutation into a form transmitted by human contact, up to 743,000 Calgary residents could be infected, resulting in a minimum of 1,600 deaths.

¶2. (U) The CHR's plan focuses resources on those traditionally most vulnerable to pandemic outbreaks: children, the infirm, and the elderly. If the disease appears to target the young, health officials advise the closure of schools and day cares across Calgary. Additionally, the plan calls for the stockpiling of two to three months worth of all critical medical supplies in Calgary, in case of regional supply line disruptions. CHR's strategy has been questioned by some because of the potential for huge staffing shortfalls in the event of a major health crisis. The CHR plan would convert numerous hotels and rehabilitation centers into makeshift influenza clinics, with bed space for 8,500; health professionals predict many of their staff simply wouldn't show up in the case of a pandemic, raising concerns in a region already faced by chronic nursing shortages.

¶3. (U) Capital Health, CHR's counterpart in Edmonton, has been developing a more comprehensive pandemic strategy since 1999. Capital tests its own infrastructure regularly to ensure its readiness in case of a major health crisis. Operation Outbreak, earlier this year, simulated the impact of a pandemic in Edmonton, with health care managers faced with overcrowded clinics, staff numbers down by a third, and extremely high-stress environments. Capital is also in the process of preparing local corporations for the possibility of 37% absenteeism rates during an outbreak. Capital's Dr. Gerry Preddy has pointed to the "disastrous mismanagement" of hurricane relief in New Orleans as a possible outcome, if Edmonton does not continue to build an effective model for dealing with pandemics.

¶4. (U) Any action on the part of the CHR or Edmonton would likely be in conjunction with the province, which recently formulated its own strategy for minimizing the impact of a pandemic. The Alberta government has purchased enough Tamiflu for 260,000 people, which would be administered to those segments of the population most affected, such as nursing homes and health care workers. The province also has in place a network of 48 health care workers named "Sentinels" whose job it is to monitor flu cases across Alberta, and report back findings to the Provincial Laboratory in Edmonton. Whether H5N1, current bogeyman of the health community, or an as yet unidentified viral strain mutates into a threat to humans, health experts predict that it is only a matter of time before Alberta is faced with a new pandemic. Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier says the city, and the province, has no choice but to prepare now noting, "(we must) ensure that in the event that this does take place, Calgary is ready".

AHMED